

Other topics described in this book include: patterns of reptile and frog distribution, locating specimens for photography or authorised capture, methods for collecting/sampling, transporting live animals, killing and preservation of specimens, care of captive specimens, and introduced (exotic) reptiles and amphibians. Although not known by Cogger at the time of writing, it is interesting to note that an exotic amphibian (the European newt *Lissotriton vulgaris*) has apparently become established in Victoria (Tingley *et al.* in press), adding some local relevance to the concerns raised in this section. A very useful feature of this book is one of the most comprehensive and relevant glossaries in the herpetological literature.

This is a large and attractive book. Its content has been refined and updated over nearly 40 years, and it remains the definitive identification guide to Australian herpetofauna. No herpetologist's bookshelf is complete without a 'Cogger'; it provides the descriptive detail that underpins the growing literature on the nation's reptiles and frogs.

Reference

Tingley R, Weeks AR, Smart AS, van Rooyen AR, Woolnough AP and McCarthy MA (2015). European newts establish in Australia, marking the arrival of a new amphibian order. *Biological Invasions* 17, 31–37

Nick Clemann

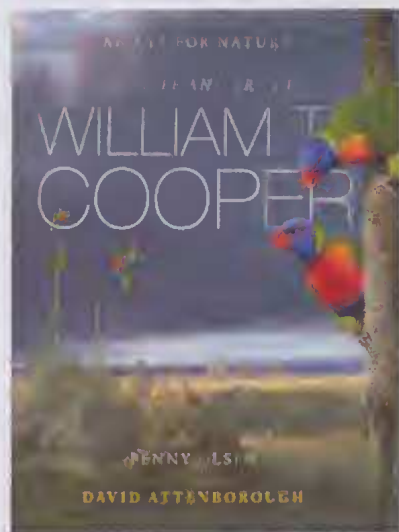
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An eye for nature: the life and art of William T Cooper

by Penny Olsen,
foreword by David Attenborough

Publisher: National Library of Australia, Canberra,
2014, x, 278 pages, hardback, coloured illustrations.
ISBN 9780642278463. RRP \$49.99

An eye for nature: the life and art of William T Cooper is a high quality production, comprising Penny Olsen's entertaining, informative, carefully researched account of William T Cooper's life and career, as well as about 200 reproductions of Cooper's superb paintings and drawings, and numerous photographs. The foreword, written by David Attenborough (who judges Cooper to be 'the best ornithological illustrator alive') is, appropriately, accompanied by a reproduction of Cooper's stunningly beautiful painting of Lesser Birds-of-paradise. (When Cooper and Attenborough were boys, both were inspired by seeing an illustration of these fascinating birds.) At the back of the book are two portfolios of previously unpublished paintings, one of birds, the other of landscapes. These are followed by a bibliography, a list of



Cooper's publications, and a very useful index. The *Rainbows on the Moor* and text on the dust jacket are also printed on the hard cover, so if anything happens to the dust jacket almost all its content will remain with the book.

Cooper has always had an interest in nature—an interest encouraged by both his parents. He grew up in the Newcastle area, where there were plenty of opportunities to explore the bush, learn bushcraft from his father, go fishing, and observe animals and plants. His mother taught

him to sketch, and he began to win prizes at an early age. He left school at 15, and did many odd jobs before becoming a window dresser, an occupation that allowed him to use his artistic talent painting backdrops for displays of merchandise. From the 1950s he entered and won prizes in art competitions, thus coming in contact with other artists, including William Dobell who gave him sound advice and introduced him to art dealers.

Today, Cooper is perhaps best known for his paintings of birds, especially those featured in books produced in collaboration with Joseph Forshaw, such as *Parrots of the World*, *The Birds of Paradise and Bower Birds*, *Australian Parrots*, *Kingfishers and Related Birds*, and *Turacos*. However, he has also painted many breathtaking pictures of a host of other animals, has travelled widely to observe his subjects in their natural surroundings, and is equally skilled in botanical illustration. His eye for detail, commitment to accuracy, and instinct for perfect composition are extraordinary.

After reading this book I am amazed that Cooper is still alive, for this remarkable artist has had many arduous and often hair-raising adventures in various parts of the world—or, as

Penny Olsen writes, 'many close shaves in pursuit of subject matter' (p. 217). During a trip to Bukit Fraser in Malaysia, for example, Cooper's driver dozed off and the car rolled down a steep hillside and hit a tree. Even here in Australia he has experienced the wrath of a male Southern Cassowary protecting his chicks from the perceived threat of a human.

There are very few faults in this book, though I was somewhat startled to see an elephant referred to as a mammoth (p. 137), and Cooper's mother's maiden name given as Cooper (p. 155) instead of Bird.

This is a most impressive book, well written, splendidly illustrated and beautifully presented. It is also an important contribution to the record of Australia's cultural heritage. At \$49.99 it is a bargain. Your interest will be aroused right from the beginning, for on the title page there is a reproduction of a painting of a domestic cat, which the caption overleaf describes as 'The infamous cat that nearly wrecked Cooper's career'. Now read on!

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One Hundred Years Ago

Wanderings on the Murray flood-plain

By J.G. O'DONOHUE

In making our first inspection of [Lake] Mournpoul, we noted that, though its area had been reduced to a considerable extent by the abnormal spell of dry weather then prevailing, there were still between 500 and 600 acres covered with water, which in some parts of the lake was estimated to have a depth of twelve feet. The lake is practically encircled by sand-dunes of varying elevations, and overflows to the north-east and south-east. Its shores are flat, and sandy in the vicinity of the dense growth of Red Gum and box timber growing on and at the base of the sand-dunes, but are extremely muddy near the water's edge. The introduced tobacco flourishes in places, and, from the appearance of many upright, decayed stems of the plant far out in the water, seems to have had a more extensive range on the lake bed than at present. The only other plant noted on the shores was the Small Knotweed, *Polygonum plebejum*. This forms, in favourable situations, a dense sward, which is kept closely cropped by the cattle, sheep, and emus.

From *The Victorian Naturalist* XXXII, pp. 19-20, May 6, 1915